

# Dishwashing

Back in Nebraska, when I was a kid, I actually liked to do household chores such as ironing, floor sweeping and, yes, dishwashing. The problem, of course, was that I was too small for many tasks and not sufficiently coordinated to do them efficiently. That's why I have such fond memories of my grandmother. Even though it would have been easier for her to do things herself, she often went out of her way to let me give it a try and always lavished me with praise for how "well" I performed whatever task was at hand. She was, in many ways, my Mr. Rogers.

As I grew up, I continued to enjoy doing housework, which was good since my mom was the original "Mrs. Clean." Mom could hear a soda can opening at one hundred yards and be there with a coaster before you could set it down on one of her highly polished tables.

By the time I was thirteen my mom was employed full-time, so I became a babysitter for my younger brother as well as housekeeper, cook and dishwasher. In this role I often prepared the evening meal right after coming home from school. I loved cooking but can't say that the rest of the family loved the results. My meat loaf was particularly difficult to tackle. Each time I made it I sought to exercise culinary creativity by adding more ingredients. Soon, it had at least a pinch of every spice Mom had, as well as generous quantities of crackers, onions and whatever other fillers I could find. I'm sure that everyone was happy when I got a job at age fourteen and we returned to Mom's cooking.

Dishwashing was a favorite household task when I was young, probably because I like the look of the dishes, glasses and utensils after they'd been hand dried. That's something we miss nowadays with our automatic dishwashers. Glasses just don't look the same. When you hand-wash them, they have a deep shine and squeak when you rub your dishtowel around them.

But I haven't always liked doing the dishes. After finishing boot camp in the Navy, I was assigned to work in a mess hall for three months, while awaiting transfer to a school. My job was to work in an outdoor place with a lean-to roof where all the pots and pans got cleaned. There were three of us assigned to the job; however, there were so many pots and pans that we never caught up with our workload. In fact, some mornings the cooks would wait in line for us to finish some pots. Each of us would stand at a huge sink with our stainless steel scratch pads and a steam hose, trying to dig the hardened crud off the pans. The egg pans were the hardest to clean. Our cooks would prepare eggs by using big pans with little indentations for each egg. When these things came out of the oven the eggs were welded to the pan. But the worst smelling things were the big cauldrons they used for storing raw liver. By the time they got to us, they'd been standing out in the open for many hours.

After I'd been in the pots-and-pans business for a month, I got a weekend pass and went home to see my folks. My mom was shocked when she saw my hands. They'd been in water with harsh soap for so long they appeared to be permanently shriveled; however,

she almost fainted when I showed her how I could get blood to flow out of my finger tips just by squeezing my hands. The steel scratch pads caused many cuts, and the conditions we worked in kept the wounds from healing.

When my wife and I bought our first house in 1966 it had a dishwasher, which took all the fun out of dishwashing, although, it required so much “pre-rinsing” that we might as well have continued with hand washing. Some years later, about 1973, I became a dishwashing pioneer. At that time, there were no liquid soaps for dishwashers on the market but we had had a dishwasher for so long that I forgot that some folks still did dishes the old fashioned way. As a result, when the bottle of free dishwashing soap arrived in the mail, I naturally assumed that this was a new product for our dishwasher, so I gave it a try. About an hour later, I left our living room to get something out of the refrigerator and discovered that the whole kitchen was filled to a depth of two feet with suds. When I explained what I had done to my wife, it took her about twenty minutes to contain her laughter. The soap was good, old-fashioned dish soap and not intended for use in dishwashers.